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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 003191

SIPDIS

NSC FOR DENNIS WILDER AND LIZ PHU

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KJUS](#) [TH](#) [CB](#)

SUBJECT: THAI PM SOMCHAI AIMS FOR CONSTITUTION AMENDMENT;
EX-PM THAKSIN PROMISES RESISTANCE TO A COUP

REF: A. BANGKOK 3167 (THAKSIN CONVICTED)

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 3154 (EX-COP THREATENS)

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Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reason: 1.4 (b and d).

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

[1](#)1. (C) Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat told the Ambassador he was committed to a peaceful resolution of political disputes. He welcomed the Ambassador's expression of USG support for democracy and the rule of law, and Somchai said the way forward entailed a fact-finding commission's report on the October 7 clash between police and protestors, and constitutional amendment, likely followed by elections. Somchai also said he looked forward to meeting Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen in Beijing during the Asia-Europe meeting, to ease bilateral tension. Separately, former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra phoned the Ambassador and predicted that, despite his recent conviction in a Supreme Court case, his political allies would continue winning elections. Thaksin said Queen Sirikit was pressuring Army Commander Anupong Paojinda to launch a coup, although Anupong resisted, knowing King Bhumibol did not favor a coup. Thaksin called for the rescision of lese majeste laws.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: Previous attempts by Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej to amend the constitution energized anti-government protests, and it is unclear that Somchai will be able to forge a consensus on an amendment process. The fact-finding committee looking into the October 7 clash may be able to buy Somchai some time, but the committee's work and findings may stir up antagonism from one side or the other. Thaksin may be correct that his allies still command significant popular support, but his conviction does represent a setback for them. We take at face value Thaksin's threat that his supporters would resist a coup. End Summary and Comment.

PRIME MINISTER ON DOMESTIC POLITICS

[1](#)3. (C) The Ambassador, accompanied by poloff, called on Prime

Minister Somchai Wongsawat on October 21. (Ref A reported Somchai's comment on the just-released court verdict against former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.) The Ambassador explained that the United State Government was closely watching developments in Thailand and wanted to help ensure that political conflicts would be resolved peacefully, within the rule of law, and in accordance with the constitution.

14. (C) Somchai, who was joined in the meeting by numerous notetakers and advisors (and with a large press spray at the top), welcomed this USG policy. He assured the Ambassador that he was committed to a peaceful settlement of political disputes. He emphasized his establishment of a fact-finding committee to investigate and report on the October 7 clash between the police and People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) protestors. Somchai predicted that all sides would be able to accept the committee's explanation.

15. (C) Speaking more broadly, Somchai said that it would be necessary to amend the Constitution in order that Thailand could move toward "genuine democracy." He said that a group of self-selected protestors would not be appropriate leaders of the amendment process; amendment should be done by "the people" or by the parliament, acting as the people's elected representatives. Somchai alluded to the possibility of forming a Constitution drafting assembly similar to the one that drafted the 1997 Constitution, saying it would be ideal if "the people" could choose their representatives to amend the Constitution. An election could then ensue, Somchai said. (According to October 22 local press reports, a government spokesman suggested that a proposed constitution drafting assembly complete its work within 120 days of the assembly's formation.)

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16. (C) The Ambassador raised the public threat of former top Royal Thai Police official Salang Bunnag to use former police officers to clear PAD demonstrators from Government House (ref B). The Ambassador asked if Somchai, having affirmed his opposition to violence, felt confident that the threatened confrontation would not take place. Somchai reiterated his commitment against violence but, when pressed on the specific threat by Salang (which had been widely covered by the local media), Somchai simply said he did not know who was involved in that effort, that the RTG would operate under the law, and the RTG would not support any act of violence.

CAMBODIA

17. (C) The Ambassador also asked Somchai's view of the recent border tension between Thailand and Cambodia. Somchai assured the Ambassador that there would be no further armed conflict between the two countries, and he planned to have a bilateral meeting with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen in Beijing during the October 24-25 Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). Somchai said he had already spoken with Hun Sen, that Thailand and Cambodia were neighbors with peaceful relations, and that any problems should be resolved through dialogue. Somchai welcomed the Ambassador's statement that the border tension represented a bilateral issue for the two countries, rather than a multilateral issue.

THAKSIN ON PARTY POLITICS, MONARCHY

18. (C) Shortly after the October 21 meeting with Somchai, former Prime Minister Thaksin phoned the Ambassador. (Ref A reported Thaksin's reaction to his conviction.) In a rambling but spirited exposition of his views, Thaksin recalled how his Thai Rak Thai party had won the 2005 election in a landslide, only to be evicted by the 2006 coup d'etat. Thaksin affirmed that he remained popular and said "my party" (now the People's Power Party, but presumably he

also referred to any subsequent incarnation) would continue to win elections by a significant margin.

¶9. (C) Thaksin said he had sent a message to Army Commander Anupong Paojinda that the Army should not seize power. Thaksin said he could guarantee that a coup in current circumstances would not resemble General Sonthi Boonyaratglin's 2006 coup -- it would not be peaceful, and Anupong would regret it, Thaksin said.

¶10. (C) Thaksin told the Ambassador that Anupong did not want to launch a coup, but Queen Sirikit was pressing him to do so. Thaksin also asserted that Anupong knew that King Bhumibol did not favor a coup. Thaksin highlighted that, at the same time when the Queen presided over the funeral of a PAD protestor, the King granted an audience to PM Somchai, sending a more positive public message than the Queen's. Thaksin added that he had been on the verge of releasing a letter in response to his conviction, but his staff had discouraged him from doing so, saying his tone would have been too angry and negative toward the monarchy. Thaksin said one item on his agenda (and presumably in his draft letter) was the need to remove lese majeste provisions from the criminal code; Thailand could not rightfully claim to be democratic so long as there remained a threat of prosecution for lese majeste.

¶11. (C) The Ambassador advised that violence by any side in the current political climate would be severely damaging, and urged Thaksin to do what he could to prevent it. The Ambassador also reiterated U.S. opposition to a coup, but noted that we were equally committed to a peaceful, legal resolution of the political standoff. Threats of violence by either side would be counterproductive.
JOHN